

MAYOR STEVEN M. FULOP



2017

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Ward F

Tuesday, February 7, 2017

6:30pm

Mary McLeod Bethune Life Center
140 Martin Luther King Drive

Good evening, and welcome to our fourth State of the City together.

I want to thank the public officials from the state and the county who have joined us tonight; members of the clergy; members of the court; the Jersey City Council who have been partners in everything we do; fellow members of my administration; and, most importantly, the residents of this great city.

In July of 2013, I stood in front of City Hall and took the oath of office as the 49th mayor of Jersey City. It was one of the proudest moments of my life, and something I remain thankful for each and every day. As your new mayor, I promised I would work to make you proud, and that is what we have tried to do as an administration for the past three and a half years.

I spoke about bringing jobs to our residents and about bringing investment to neighborhoods west of the waterfront. I talked about the importance of strong schools and the drive to provide all of Jersey City's students with the opportunities they deserve. I was passionate about encouraging new businesses to move into Jersey City, and about how small businesses are the foundation of our local economy. I talked about my commitment to making Jersey City one of the best mid-sized cities in the country, and while we still have more work to do, I believe we have begun to reach the benchmarks we set out to achieve.

During those first few moments, on the steps of City Hall, I outlined my plan, and my hope, to build an administration that would truly move our city forward. We have had some incredible successes, as well as some challenging moments, but overall the state of the city is strong, and only getting stronger.

I honestly believe that the success of any government is measured by tangible results, and I know that we have so much we can point to that proves our progress. During the past three and a half years, we have built a city that has become the economic engine of the region; a city that has become an example of innovative solutions to social issues; and a city that has accomplished it all while remaining fiscally responsible to its residents, which might be considered our most remarkable achievement.

We have seen unemployment in Jersey City drop to the lowest rate in 25 years. This has been no coincidence, but rather, has been the result of a deliberate process of working together with businesses to bring jobs and stability back to Jersey City. On both job creation and small business creation, we are number one in New Jersey. With job creation at the forefront of our policy priorities, we have brought over 7,000 jobs to Jersey City during the past three and a half years, and have seen over 600 new small businesses open here. We certainly have more work to do when it comes to ensuring that these jobs are being made available to all residents, especially groups that have been previously overlooked, but I feel as though we have begun to take important steps forward.

We have continued to lead the state in construction starts, with nearly 10,000 units currently

under construction, and another 17,000 units approved. For the first time we can say that development is not exclusive to one neighborhood. Whether you live on the West Side or in the Heights – you have seen the outcome of the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of investment that we have brought in to our city.

For the first time in decades, we are seeing development occur in Journal Square, something that past administrations had promised to do time and time again. It is easy to revitalize a waterfront, and for years we have seen this type of progress occur up and down the Hudson River. Yet, I believe that the true success story is being written now, as the geographic heart of our city becomes the symbol of a citywide renaissance.

Above all, it is important to us that this progress is inclusive, and we have worked hard to ensure that there are opportunities for all residents, in all wards. We have built more affordable housing during the past three years than any prior administration in the city's history.

We have continued to invest in housing for our city's veterans as well, and as a Marine, these projects are especially meaningful to me. We were the first in New Jersey to take on Michelle Obama's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, and we are well on our way to accomplishing this goal. This past October, we opened a development specifically for homeless and disabled veterans, which includes on-site social services. I want to thank Freeholder Bill O'Dea, Pat Kelleher and the Hudson County Building Trades for volunteering thousands of construction hours to make this project possible.

This year, we will continue to build on this progress, with an upcoming Ocean Avenue project in partnership with the Jersey City Redevelopment Agency that will add 20 veteran-priority units, with units reserved specifically for homeless veterans.

Regarding our city's children, three and half years ago, I spoke about my commitment to providing quality education for all of Jersey City's students. Since then, we have made incredible headway toward improving our schools. In partnership with the Board of Education, we have regained nearly full local control over our public school district after being controlled by the state for more than twenty years.

Last year, we demonstrated the strength of this promise with the opening of the Dr. Maya Angelou Public School- the city's first newly constructed school in more than a decade, which now serves over 600 of Jersey City's students in a state-of-the-art facility.

We look forward to the opening of two additional schools - an Elementary School in the Heights, and a new public school to open Downtown in a residential housing development, which we announced last year. This partnership project is the first of its kind in the state, and is funded through private investment, serving as an example of the innovative solutions we have developed to address a growing school system. We understand the importance of early childhood education as well, and we are working hard to provide classrooms for all of our

youngest residents. Just last July, we opened a new 10-classroom pre-k center on the West Side.

While we view the increased demand on our schools as a constructive challenge, we also view it as an indicator of our success in building a city in which families want to grow. We have seen an incredible surge of new residents move into Jersey City during the past few years, and now we are seeing that families are not only beginning here, but that they are staying here as well.

Just as we have seen improvements in our school system, I am proud of the work that has allowed Jersey City to serve as a model for others on many policy initiatives. We have become the first in New Jersey to enact paid sick leave legislation; to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour for our municipal workers; to provide trans-inclusive coverage to city employees; to create a nationwide model for prisoner reentry programs; and to launch a citywide bike share program.

We continue to find ways to stand at the forefront of these issues and we are proud of that. This past Friday, I signed an executive order establishing Jersey City as a sanctuary city, as we promise to continue to protect Jersey City's unified culture. This is one of the most diverse cities in the nation, and regardless of the neighborhood in which you live, I am sure that you have experienced the ways in which this diversity adds to the vibrancy of our city. This is a truly unique place to live, to work, and to grow up, and I hope that every day, you are proud to live in a place that celebrates culture, and values all residents for exactly who they are.

Tonight, I stand before you to deliver the final State of the City of my first mayoral term. I am honored to have been given the opportunity to serve each and every one of our city's residents during the past three and half years.

Each day of this term has brought us closer to defining, and effectively implementing our shared, collective vision for the future of our city. We have never showed signs of slowing, never relied simply on our most noteworthy accomplishments to move us forward, and never stopped working to build one Jersey City, issue by issue, neighborhood by neighborhood.

This past year, we have continued to advance our city, together.

We have effectively kept our promises to grow our economy, and expand services to our residents, without raising taxes. For the third year in a row, residents have seen no tax increases, despite a growing police force, the expansion of affordable housing, and the investment of millions of dollars in city parks. Few cities in New Jersey can make this claim, and this year we are committed to keeping this promise yet again, with stable taxes for the fourth straight year.

Last year, we also received our third consecutive credit rating upgrade. This progress is measured by an independent rating agency that recognizes the success of our fiscal policies, which is something we are incredibly proud of.

The implementation of sound fiscal policies has allowed us to focus on progressive policy initiatives that will move our city forward together. However, it became increasingly important for us to speak directly to the residents of each ward, not only about the state of the city as a whole, but also about the progress we are making in each neighborhood, for example, right here in Bergen-Lafayette. We value the unique qualities of each of our diverse neighborhoods, and understand the individual role each plays as an important piece of the puzzle. We are here at the Bethune Center tonight to talk about the importance of the Bergen-Lafayette section, and the commitments we plan on making over the next year to move this neighborhood forward. This year, we plan producing more affordable housing and increasing our police force to help build a stronger Bergen-Lafayette neighborhood. These are our commitments to you as we start 2017.

Since the start of this administration, public safety has been at the forefront of our policies and priorities. We know that new jobs, new schools, and new services must be complemented by a strong sense of security in order to be considered successful. We have spent the past three and a half years strengthening our police force and finding innovative solutions to our city's public safety challenges. However, the truth is, crime still exists in some of our neighborhoods and communities, and we are not blind to the reality of our challenges.

It comes as no surprise to anyone in this room tonight that crime is still something we struggle with in this particular neighborhood. We are aware of this, and we understand the toll this takes on you and your family. We have accomplished much during the past few years, both here and throughout the city, but the truth is, building a safer neighborhood for everyone in this room, and everyone in this community, is the part of my job that I take most seriously. Yes, development in Journal Square or new businesses in the Heights are great for our city, but if I can find ways to make residents of this community feel more comfortable walking home at night, or to feel a greater sense of pride in this neighborhood, then I know we have done our job.

We have not ignored this issue or brushed it aside, but rather, have taken firm and strategic steps towards solving these issues. I cannot stress enough the impact more police officers will have on this city, and I am proud of the steps we have taken to grow our police force to the largest it has been in 20 years.* When we first took office in 2013, the Jersey City Police Department was at an all time low of manpower – 779 police officers. It was my goal to expand our police force to over 900 officers during our first term, and I am proud to report that the most recent class of police recruits brings our police force to 922 officers- the largest it has been in over two decades.

This year, we are committing to further strengthening our police department by hiring two new classes of recruits, which will add 50 new officers to our police force. We are committed to having a police force of 950 officers. Building a safer city begins with building a strong police force, and I promise we will never stop working towards this goal.

Many of the police officers that joined the police force in the past year have been placed in the South and West Districts on walking beats on the south side of the city. Our most recent class of recruits spent their first month of training immersed in the communities they will soon be serving. This is the first time our recruits have begun their training by spending time in the community. We hired this class one month early so that they can integrate and learn about the community they will serve. They visited local organizations, churches and met with leaders who were able to give important insight on the types of issues these neighborhoods face, and ways in which these officers can better understand and serve those particular concerns. The only way to build a safer city is through strong partnerships within the community, and I believe that this new initiative for our recruits speaks to our commitment to building those relationships.

It was only a few years ago that we inherited a police department that did not adequately reflect the diversity of our communities. We have come a long way since then, and I am proud that over 70% of the officers hired since 2013 have been minorities. This year, we swore in one of the most diverse classes of police officers in the city's history, and have placed an emphasis on continuing to build a police department that represents the composition of this city.

It is important that our new officers have the tools they need to be effective, and we have employed community members to help identify innovative solutions that complement our officer's efforts. Our administration put in place the first public safety review board for the police department, comprised of people who live and work here. With their leadership, we recently started the installation of an entirely new CCTV camera program, with 200 cameras being installed throughout the city. We are beginning to install these cameras in the South and West Districts, with the remainder of the cameras being installed later this year. Improved technology has had a major impact on our efforts to solve our public safety challenges, and we have made it our goal to be at the forefront of these types of innovations.

While new technology helps our officers make more informed decisions, it does not replace the type of crucial information that can be gained through positive community-officer relationships. I want to recognize a group that we work with who have taken incredible steps toward successfully building community relationships, and one that will continue to make lasting impressions on the residents, and children, of this community. Black Law Enforcement Serving the Community, is an organization of law enforcement officers who are committed to giving back to their community through mentoring and service. These officers care deeply about this neighborhood, and volunteer their time to work within the community to promote anti-gang and anti-violence messages, and they have been terrific partners. I am exceptionally proud of this group, and each of the officers who take the time to make a difference, while in and out of uniform, and I look forward to working together to build a stronger and safer Bergen-Lafayette.

Our approach to public safety is comprehensive, and effectively incorporates new technology and community involvement to build safer neighborhoods. However, we also understand the importance of providing economic opportunities that will help to prevent crime. When we opened Martin's Place in July of 2014, we knew that we were taking the first step in creating a national

model for prisoner reentry programs. Providing a second chance for previously incarcerated residents should be a major priority for urban cities everywhere, because when we work to break the cycle of recidivism in positive and productive ways, we help build stronger individuals, stronger families, and ultimately, stronger communities.

While our reentry program has been nationally recognized for its success, we have not lost sight of the importance of helping young men and women in this community gain the skills and experiences necessary to build productive careers, as well. We remain aware of the need for opportunities for young people who have proactively taken measures to pursue a career. Our ongoing Jersey City Summer Works Initiative, which is now in its fourth year, brings together public sector, private sector, and local nonprofits to provide comprehensive youth employment and enrichment efforts to over 1,000 students a year here in Jersey City. Programs such as this give young people in our communities a chance to explore different career paths, and learn crucial skills that will help to move them forward.

We have prioritized recreation and youth involvement programs as a way to keep our city's students engaged after school, providing pathways to new learning experiences, chances to become involved in the community. We want our city's youth to use their time outside of school in fun, productive, and, most importantly, safe ways.

That is why we have added over 30 new recreation programs and have reappropriated our budget to include nearly \$1 million towards expanding these programs since the start of our administration. Last year, we expanded parks and recreation programming in all six wards, and began collaborating with the Board of Education to bring programming to the city's schools. In addition to conventional activities, such as basketball and soccer, after school programming also includes educational opportunities, including an engineering workshop and homework assistance. This year, through partnerships with the Board of Education and Jersey City Together, we will expand afterschool recreation programming in schools 14, 15 and 29.

We realize that recreation programs shouldn't only serve young people, which is why we have made a commitment to expand programming for all residents, at every level. The Bethune Center serves as a great example of a space where our expanded recreation offerings have been extremely successful. You may remember a few years ago that this center sorely lacked programming, and was used primarily as a party rental space. We wanted to change that, and I am excited that this space now serves as an important cultural center for the Ward F community. Through Alvin's leadership, The Bethune Center now services thousands of people a week with programs ranging from salsa lessons, to art classes and drama workshops.

The programs we have added also rely on strong partnerships with groups within the community. We partner with social service groups, housing groups, recreation partners, but tonight, I want to recognize a group that has been serving as an example of a positive force in this community, and one that has taken the initiative to empower young women, in this neighborhood and beyond. The H.O.N.E.Y Bees, who are here with us tonight, have continued

to grow during the past year into a community organization that motivates and empowers young women through double-dutch. This team, which celebrated placing in a national championship last year, has worked in tandem with the city's Recreation Department to mentor and empower these young women, instilling in them the confidence they need to be successful.

We want to make Jersey City a place that allows children to explore their interests, discover new ideas, and learn in exciting ways. We also want our city's youth, and especially those within this neighborhood, to have access to opportunities that will allow them to succeed. Just a few weeks ago, the City Council approved plans for the expansion of the Liberty Science Center, known as SciTech Scity. The \$280 million project will be developed by the science center in conjunction with the city, and will feature a biotech lab, a coding lab, a technology business incubator and a K-12 STEM-focused public school. This is truly a transformative project, and one that will establish Jersey City, and Bergen-Lafayette specifically, as the home of the region's premier innovation destination, as well as educate the next generation of students as leaders in the fields of science and technology.

We know that thriving communities include safe places to live, work and learn, but we also recognize the importance of investing in places to play as well. We have made significant investments in parks and open space in this neighborhood, and know that in the past, these valuable community assets were too often overlooked.

Last spring, we opened Berry Lane Park, a project that we pushed through to completion by reallocating city resources and pursuing additional grant funding. This former industrial site is now the city's largest municipal park, and the first to be constructed in decades. When we opened this flagship park, we knew that this park would bring together families from all over the city, but most importantly, we knew it would enhance the neighborhood overall. I hope you and your family have had a chance to explore this 17-acre park, with its basketball courts, soccer fields, a football field and a spray park.

More recently, we have finalized the proposed redesign of Fulton Avenue Park, which will include more open space, a performance space, and space for a farmer's market. We have collaborated with the community on this redesign, including the Jackson Hill SID, and we hope that this repurposed space becomes the positive community asset it once was.

Just as we have invested in new officers, new youth programs and new parks to build a stronger Bergen-Lafayette, it is important that we provide the resources necessary for people to stay in their homes and be part of the changing city. That is why this year we will take several important steps to make sure that our lifelong residents can continue to call Jersey City home.

I mentioned earlier that we have built more affordable housing units in the last three years than in the previous ten years combined, however we know that we are still just scraping the surface. This year, we are committing to over 600 new or preserved affordable units.

We will also continue to push for more projects with inclusionary affordable housing. As we scale back and revise our tax abatement program, the one place we will continue to focus is affordable housing.

We recently approved a project that will include 54 units of affordable housing in nine scattered sites around the HUB. We want to ensure that the economic revitalization occurring in this area does not negatively impact the affordability of housing within this neighborhood, and we are committed to protecting this balance.

Another important step in protecting our residents is the expansion of our landlord-tenant office in City Hall. This office hasn't seen a significant upgrade in decades, and this year we will provide additional resources and caseworkers to expand capacity. We will revamp the landlord-tenant office website so that tenants have easier access to important information. We will also create a database of lawyers that can help advocate for tenant rights when problems arise.

We aim to provide our residents with the resources they need to ensure that they feel protected in their homes and in their communities. Later this month, with the support of Council President Rolando Lavarro, an ordinance will be introduced that strengthens our city's rules regarding door-to-door solicitations. We understand that aggressive real estate solicitations may make homeowners feel uncomfortable and vulnerable in their own homes, and we have taken real measures to resolve this issue. The city will establish a "No-Knock" Registry that will help protect homeowners from door-to-door solicitations, and will safeguard their privacy.

This year, we are taking concrete steps towards providing more affordable housing, and providing resources and protections for residents and homeowners. Yet, we understand that building neighborhoods that people call home also requires us to focus on strengthening the local economy, too.

The local economy is the pulse of any city, and our approach to building one Jersey City starts with strengthening the economies within our neighborhoods. We have worked to encourage projects that will bring life to areas of the city that deserve them the most. It is no secret that Bergen-Lafayette has been a long-overlooked neighborhood when it comes to economic development, which has resulted in a detrimental lack of activity and opportunity, and sometimes a feeling of hopelessness. When my administration first took office, we worked to find ways to prioritize this neighborhood, and saw the importance of investing here. Since then, we have made significant strides in rebuilding this crucial neighborhood, and I know that the future of Bergen-Lafayette has never looked better.

As an example of the type of economic investment we are bringing to this community, last year we broke ground on the City Hall Annex to be located at the HUB. This is a pivotal undertaking, and one that will bring new activity to a commercial center that has enormous potential. This \$20 million dollar, state-of-the-art project is the single largest development investment made in

Bergen-Lafayette history, and will be the center of the area's economic revitalization. We are bringing 300 city employees to this new development in order to spark this revitalization. With new activity comes new businesses, and we expect new restaurants and shops to follow this investment.

We have seen businesses begin to believe in our vision for this neighborhood, as well. We also brought a full-service bank back to the HUB, which had been without one for nearly five years prior. This was a major accomplishment, and will continue to provide new financial opportunities and resources for residents.

We have identified ways to incentivize private investment along this neighborhood's commercial corridors as well. During the past year, several public meetings were held to bring community members together to help the city develop the Jackson Hill Redevelopment Plan. This plan lays out a roadmap for attracting residential and commercial development along the 2.4-mile long commercial corridor connecting McGinley Square to Greenville, including Monticello Avenue and Martin Luther King Drive. I want to thank everyone who took the time to help craft this plan, with a special thanks to Michele Massey, who has been not only a tremendous partner, but also an incredible community leader.

During the past year, we have seen the first wave of these important investments occur locally. In April, we celebrated the opening of the Baker Building, which is the first major private residential development in Ward F. We view this project as a milestone for this community, and as the first of many projects that you will continue to see during the next few years. New small businesses have also begun to take root in Bergen-Lafayette too, and we celebrate the vibrancy these businesses bring to this community.

We have made important improvements to the local infrastructure as well. Last spring, the city began a repaving program to resurface over 16 miles of roads throughout the city. In Bergen-Lafayette, this included major streets such as Ocean Avenue, Monticello Avenue, and Communipaw Avenue, among many additional roadways that have been neglected for a long time. Over the next year, we will continue to make upgrades to this neighborhood's infrastructure, with intersection safety and traffic signal improvements on Martin Luther King Drive, as well as additional roadway reconstruction.

Since my very first moments as mayor of this city, I have valued this community, and have worked ever since to make each and every resident within this community proud to be from Bergen-Lafayette. This neighborhood had long been a forgotten place, and the level of neglect that can be seen here took decades to occur. Many of these issues cannot be solved overnight, or even, in a single mayoral term. However, I truly believe we have started to lay the framework that will revive this community and restore hope in its residents. Over the coming year, our major focus on public safety and affordable housing in Bergen-Lafayette will continue to move this neighborhood forward in significant ways.

As stated earlier, the success of any administration is measured by results. Just as I stood on the steps of City Hall almost four years ago to discuss future priorities for our administration, I stand before you this evening to outline the successes we have accomplished together, as a community.

We did not come here tonight to simply offer a checklist of everything we have done right during the past three and a half years, but rather, we are here this evening to reassure you that we are making incredible progress together, and are moving forward in truly exciting ways.

Most importantly, I wanted to give you an honest assessment of where our administration stands on critical issues that impact your life every day. As our city, and our neighborhoods, continue to grow, we promise to never stop improving, and we hope tonight has served as further proof that we spend each and every day working to move this city forward.

Your presence here tonight shows that you care, and that you are willing to play a role in making our community even stronger. I sincerely thank each and every one of you for this, and I look forward to continuing to work together. I have found that building relationships with residents, and partnerships within the community, has truly been one of the most rewarding experiences of being mayor.

As we look to the future, please know that we will continue to act with personal care and attention, offering everything we have to creating one Jersey City that affords resources and successes to all of our residents. With your help and perseverance, even during these politically divisive times, I am certain that we will continue to unite our neighborhoods, and we will all be better for our efforts. Thank you and God Bless Jersey City.